SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL ARTS

BRITISH COLUMBIA
ARTS COUNCIL
An agency of the Province of British Columbia

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

One of the BC Arts Council's main priorities is to support the unique role of Aboriginal artists and communities. This document will elaborate on this specific goal and provide examples of how the Council's decision to strongly support Aboriginal arts has positively impacted Aboriginal communities and artists across British Columbia.

INTRODUCTION

Artistic traditions are crucial to cultural existence, especially for Aboriginal people living in British Columbia. Today, after surviving many hardships and threats to these artistic practices, Aboriginal people play a key role within the artistic communities across the province. These practices include a variety of disciplines such as dance, music, theatre, visual arts, creative writing and media arts. Although there remains a strong focus on traditional arts, many Aboriginal artists are creating works equally influenced by both traditional ways and modern-day life. In other words, it is an exciting time for the evolution of Aboriginal art. Through funding, the BC Arts Council demonstrates its commitment to supporting many forms of cultural expression and artistic journeys within Aboriginal communities.

ABORIGINAL ARTS DEVELOPMENT AWARDS (AADA)

Over the years the BC Arts Council has formed a strong partnership with the First Peoples' Cultural Council, a provincial Crown corporation formed by the government of British Columbia in 1990 to administer the First Peoples' Heritage, Language and Culture Program. Together, the councils founded the Aboriginal Arts Development Awards, a program that supports emerging Aboriginal artists and organizations in developing their practices. The awards are distributed across four categories: Aboriginal arts administrator and cultural manager internships; emerging individual artists; sharing traditional arts across generations; and organizations and collectives. The BC Arts Council values the significance of these awards and recognizes the positive effect that they have on Aboriginal communities across British Columbia.

AADA HIGHLIGHTS

THE DANE-ZAA ART COLLECTIVE

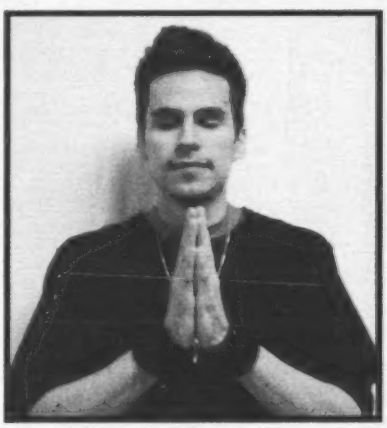
Dane-Zaa Art Collective, "Life Stages"
Photo by: Garry Oker

The Dane-Zaa Art Collective (Fort St. John) is an AADA recipient in the category of sharing traditional arts across generations. Their project, *Mapping our Digital Dreams*, focuses on the collecting, archiving, translating and transmitting of traditional knowledge across generations using a digital mapping system. This project involves both youth and elders under the supervision of Artistic Director Garry Oker, who will be working alongside two professional new media artists. The intention of this interactive project is to engage the community in learning about and celebrating cultural history, while introducing new dimensions of sharing through digital technology.

"The Aboriginal Arts Development Awards provide valuable support for the rich contributions of First Nations and Aboriginal artists and organizations in the province. Our longstanding partnership with the BC Arts Council demonstrates our shared commitment to the unique and vital artistic voices of Aboriginal people in B.C."

-Cathi Charles Wherry, Arts Program Manager, First Peoples' Cultural Council

WARREN HOOLEY



Warren Hooley, "Meditation"
Photo by: Victoria Baptiste

Warren Hooley, an Okanagan Indigenous man born and currently living in Penticton, received an AADA in the category of emerging individual artist. Through workshop facilitation and hip hop performances, Warren aims to deliver a powerful and uplifting message that he believes all races and all ages can enjoy and understand. His message is delivered through his story, a journey from the depths of addictions to living a life full of healthy food, positive thoughts and following his heart. In Warren's opinion, music can represent the change we want to see in the world, influencing people today and for generations to come.

BC ARTS COUNCIL PROGRAMS

Aboriginal artists and organizations are welcome to apply to all BC Arts Council programs. The BC Arts Council provides financial assistance to both arts and cultural organizations and individual artists through several funding programs, with a wide range of assistance available. The BC Arts Council strongly encourages Aboriginal artists and organizations to consider the Aboriginal Arts Development Awards as well as all other BC Arts Council programs, as several of these may be extremely relevant to their practices. With regards to the Aboriginal Arts Development Awards, the BC Arts Council aims to create a bridging effect by having successful recipients apply to BC Arts Council programs once they have completed their AADA project.

BC ARTS COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

FULL CIRCLE: FIRST NATIONS PERFORMANCE

Full Circle, "The Bird Messengers"
Photo by: Chris Randle

Full Circle: First Nations Performance is a distinguished Aboriginal organization supported by the BC Arts Council in the arts training and theatre programs. Over the years, Full Circle has positively affected Aboriginal communities and British Columbia's general public, offering unique experiences to both audience members and participants. Through performance, the complex history and progression of Aboriginal peoples is presented, serving an educational purpose while providing an artistic experience. The annual multi-disciplinary Talking Stick Festival continues to grow in popularity, hosting a variety of contemporary art performances while maintaining respect towards Aboriginal traditions. Full Circle also provides a training program as well as a variety of workshops for emerging Aboriginal artists in order to support artistic development.

THE U'MISTA CULTURAL SOCIETY

U'Mista Cultural Society
"The Story of the Totem Pole" Exhibition
Photo by: Peter Hilz

The U'mista Cultural Society in Alert Bay is supported by many funders, including through the BC Arts Council's museums program. U'mista houses an exclusive collection of potlatch artifacts that were eturned to the community after being confiscated during The Potlatch Ban. Many of these historical treasures traveled to Europe in 2011 as part of an exchange with the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden museum in Germany. This exchange was a great success and the U'mista Cultural Society continues to find ways of sharing Kwakwaka'wakw culture with the world. U'mista also provides several significant services to local community members through storytelling, summer programs, gallery tours and participation in various festivals. Some consider the U'mista Cultural Society to be the heart of Alert Bay, as it is an organization that takes great pride in its community.

DANCERS OF DAMELAHAMID

Dancers of Damelahamid, "Spirit and Tradition"
Photo by: Derek Dix

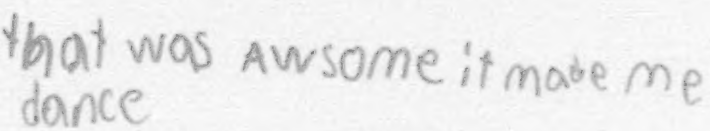
Dancers of Damelahamid are a Gitxsan dance group based in West Vancouver. They deliver their traditional stories through majestic song and dance performances while bridging modern and traditional style. The BC Arts Council has supported the development of Dancers of Damelahamid through its dance program, assisting the organization to develop innovative new work and tour to other parts of Canada. Dancers of Damelahamid maintain and transfer traditional knowledge while sharing Aboriginal heritage with a broader audience. With powerful voices accompanying the beat of the drum and swift dance moves enhanced by eye-catching regalia, the Dancers of Damelahamid create an atmosphere that is powerful and timeless.

BC TOURING COUNCIL

Each year the BC Arts Council supports the BC Touring Council in delivering the Community Presenters Assistance Program. This program provides awards to presenters of British Columbian and Canadian professional performing arts touring events in the categories of Community Presenter, Key Presenter or Diverse Collaborations Presenter.

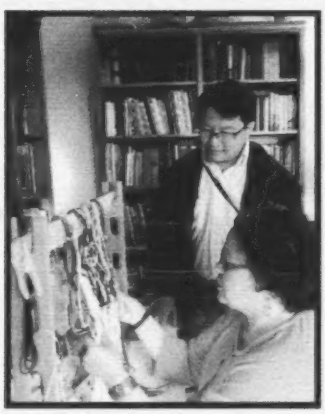
LAKES DISTRICT ARTS COUNCIL

The Lakes District Arts Council is a volunteer organization in Burns Lake funded in part through the Community Presenters Assistance Program. Each year the Arts Council presents a seven concert series, inviting members of the community to attend a variety of performances from many cultures, including those from Aboriginal groups. As a non-Aboriginal organization, the Lakes District Arts Council recognizes the importance of supporting the local Aboriginal community. In partnership with local First Nations bands, schools, service clubs and small businesses, the Arts Council runs a program called Arts 4 Youth. This program offers youth, many of Aboriginal descent, an opportunity to attend performances for free. Aboriginal youth and adults of Burns Lake also serve on the Council's board of directors. The Lakes District Arts Council continues to strengthen its relationship with the local Aboriginal community and truly values the community's existing involvement.



Lakes District Arts Council
Anonymous Submission

BC ARTS COUNCIL PUBLIC OUTREACH



Program Officer Walter Quan visits
Dolly Garza
Photo by: Sue Donaldson

The BC Arts Council strives to inform artists and organizations about the opportunities available to them. While there have been successful efforts to extend information sessions to rural Aboriginal communities, the Council acknowledges that public outreach to such communities needs to be of greater focus in the future. Recently, two of Council's program officers visited Haida Gwaii where they held information sessions in two communities and conducted studio visits. Their aim was to ensure that the arts community on Haida Gwaii is aware of the existing support offered by the BC Arts Council.

FOLLOWING PROTOCOL

The BC Arts Council recognizes that Aboriginal communities follow specific protocols and as a demonstration of respect, the Council implements some of these practices. The Council begins jury or advisory committee meetings by acknowledging First Nations territory. During the adjudication process, a committee member may self-identify as Aboriginal. Individual members are not expected to represent all Aboriginal peoples; however, they may be able to provide a better understanding of protocol use within Aboriginal communities. This is important as applicants are asked to consider how their practice engages community within a culturally diverse society.

When applying for an Aboriginal Arts Development Award, applicants are asked to discuss following proper protocols and seeking permissions from their Aboriginal community. One or both may be needed; this is determined on a case by case basis. Although not a requirement when applying to BC Arts Council programs, applicants are welcome to provide any support material demonstrating that they have consulted with the local Aboriginal community.

For information on how to engage with a specific nation, contact the local friendship centre or band office.

CONCLUSION

Artistic expression is deeply rooted in Aboriginal cultures throughout British Columbia. The BC Arts Council understands that supporting artistic expressions is essential to the survival of traditional Aboriginal arts and the growth of contemporary Aboriginal arts practices. Council will continue to consider ways to enhance support for Aboriginal communities and artists across British Columbia, understanding that there is still room for improvement. However, with support from the First Peoples' Cultural Council, BC Arts Council programs and information sessions, the BC Touring Council, and other organizations, Aboriginal arts are flourishing in British Columbia. It is important to the BC Arts Council to recognize the place that Aboriginal arts hold within British Columbia and to celebrate the rich history and present-day successes of these cultural expressions.

AKNOWLEDGEMENT

The BC Arts Council would like to thank those who provided information and participated in the creation of this publication. We share these stories of accomplishment with great pride and are very honoured to support the cultural development of Aboriginal peoples across British Columbia.

Cover Art by: Kelli Clifton